

## ASSESSING THE RELATIVE PREDICTIVE STRENGTHS OF THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY FACTORS FOR MORAL JUDGEMENT OF CHILDREN

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### ABSTRACT

*The study examined the predictive strengths of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness dimensions of the Big Five personality for moral judgement of children. The study selected three hundred thirty children with an equal number of males ( $M = 10.01$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) and females ( $M = 9.99$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) with age ranging from 7 years to 11 years. The Big Five Questionnaire-Children (Barbaranelli, Caprara, Rabasca, & Pastorelli, 2003) and the Moral Judgement Test (Sinha, & Verma, 1971) were used to measure personality and moral judgement of children, respectively. It was observed that the female children exhibited significantly higher mean scores on conscientiousness dimension of personality and moral judgement as compared the male participants. Contrarily, the mean scores of extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability and openness dimensions of personality did not evince significant gender differences. Irrespective of gender, the scores on predictors and criterion measures of children again evinced significant positive correlations. The results of hierarchical regression analysis exhibited that gender, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness accounted for 3.70%, 11.50%, 11.80% and 16.40% variations in the scores of moral judgement, respectively. The study recorded an important contribution of Big Five personality in understanding the moral judgement of children. The findings carry theoretical and practical implications for researchers, parents, teachers and educational policymakers. The directions for future research have also been given.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness, Children, the Big Five Personality, Moral Judgement*

### INTRODUCTION

Morality is a special virtue of human-being that helps to distinguish between right and wrong with reference to a socio-cultural context (Haidt, & Kesebir, 2010). The study of morality is pertinent as it helps to explain various dimensions of human behaviours across all developmental periods. The current findings on morality do not seem sufficient as they do not incorporate issues related to morality in modern changing societies, multiculturalism and dissimilar political or religious orientations (Haidt, & Graham, 2007; Harvey, & Callan, 2014). It has recently been suggested that human

morality can be best understood and explained in terms of social constructions, the concept of the moral self and relationship between thoughts and experiences (Ellemers, van der Toorn, Paunov, & van Leeuwen, 2019). Moreover, recent societal developments and changes have compelled researchers to have a fresh look at the nature and dynamics of morality adopting an eclectic approach (Ellemers et al., 2019).

Personality attributes of individuals are very important to understand moral judgments. For example, competence or sociability (Chen, Ybarra, & Kiefer, 2004) is a very relevant paradigm to understand moral judgements as it provides for evaluations of individuals, groups and organizations (Ellemers et al., 2019). Moreover, understanding intentions pertinent to moral judgements are derived from these attributes of agreeableness and communality (Ellemers et al., 2019). Likewise, personality attributes of self-control, honesty, reliability, other-orientation and dependability are equally important to decipher its associated outcomes (Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches, & Dunlop, 2012). Recent empirical research has studied morality arriving at five basic themes inherent in the study of this construct namely, moral reasoning, moral judgments, moral behaviour, moral emotions and moral self-views (Ellemers et al., 2019). This research suggests that the interplay between thoughts and experiences constitutes one of the important issues relevant to the study of morality (Ellemers et al., 2019). In essence, it has been suggested that personality is an important construct that carries significance to underscore the basic nature of morality. Personality refers to a coherent patterning of affect, behaviour, cognition and desires over time and space. It has been reported that personality dimensions are associated significantly with individual differences in affective level and environmental responsivity (Corr, 2008; Revelle, 1995). The importance of studying morality has been recognized in a study that involved a review of research on morality published from 1940 through 2017 (Ellemers et al., 2019). This review suggests that the current status of research on morality is fragmented and some significant questions related to human morality still need systematic empirical investigation (Ellemers et al., 2019). Moreover, the study recognizes that the current research on morality is dominated by overreliance on samples derived from American population that ignores political ideologies examining the role of cultural and political contexts of moral concerns (Nilson, & StruppLevitsky, 2016).

In essence, the above discussion makes it apparent that morality is a desirable attribute of human beings. Piaget (1965) has argued that moral development entails movement from moral realism to moral relativism. The former is characterized by objective responsibility in which children evaluate misbehaviour in terms of the amount of damage done without reference to intention. Thus, 7 or 8 years children think of justice as rigid and inflexible rules of right and wrong which they learn from parents, teachers and significant others. The latter denotes subjective responsibility in which behaviour is judged by the intention of the person rather than its consequences. By the age of 8 to 11 years, equalitarianism concern is increased that is blended with ideas of equity and fairness of adolescence. According to Enright et al. (1994), moral development is indicative of a host of important aspects of personality. The developmental trends in morality have also been studied by Kohlberg (1976) who proposed six stages of moral development. Kohlberg (1976) has suggested that the first stage involves a concern with punishment in which justice is decided by an authority figure. The second stage is relativist justice that involves reciprocity. The third stage involves group justice or consensus. The fourth and fifth stages widen to cover societal laws and the realization of existing unfair laws to work within the social framework of society. Finally, the sixth stage is indicative of an intrinsic realization of the value of maintaining a justice which embraces rights for everybody. Forgiveness as a moral concept exists on the side of self-sacrificial love, benevolence, beneficence, and supererogation.

It has been argued that due to the distinctions in the cognitive and emotional attributes of children and adults, some significant differences in their moral attributes may be expected. It has been reported that many relevant abilities develop along with the development of morality in children. For example, the concept of forgiveness, an important ability, develops at a young age and younger children were able to comprehend the intentions and motives of transgressors and the role of apology similar to older children and adults (Darby, & Schlenker, 1982). Similarly, it has been observed that young children show signs of guilt as a result of transgressions and make appropriate efforts to repair the damage (Helwig, & Jasiobedzka, 2001). The children of younger age group also show their understanding of the intentions of others and the role of morality, justice and rights (Helwig, & Jasiobedzka, 2001). Thus, these findings support the contention that younger children are capable of reasoning about a range of ethical and moral issues (Helwig et al., 2001). One important thing is that most of the earlier research studying the relationship between personality and moral judgements are confined to adults. For example, a study examined the relationship between the Big Five-factor model and moral reasoning in a sample of 122 adults with age ranging from 18 years to 46 years reported that principled moral reasoning linked to markers of intellectual-academic ability and openness to experience. Thus, openness to experience was reported to be the best predictor of moral reasoning (Dollinger, & LaMartina, 1998).

Children are expected to learn a variety of interpersonal interactions to come up with the expected standard of their peers. It is also indicative of the beginning and consolidation of their relationship building, cooperation, competition, team building, learning and maturing on a host of socially expected skills. These developmental tasks of this age group naturally evince that the study of morality may be a commendable contribution. Earlier research has shown that children exhibit many abilities and tendencies that may have a close connection with their morality. For example, children are able to empathize, understand the intention and motives of others. Moreover, they can also differentiate between real and imagined causes of behaviours of others as well as of themselves. These abilities may be assumed to serve as essential conditions to understand and practice morality. Thus, it is clear that personality attributes are important to understand morality. But the relationship between personality and morality of children has been neglected. It has been argued that the various attributes of children develop in a consonant and congruent manner. For example, moral, cognitive and emotional developments of children may be assumed to co-vary or develop along with the development of morality of children. Thus, it would be important to understand the coherence in the development of personality and morality of children. Many interpersonal and social outcomes have been reported to be associated with the morality of adults. For example, pro-social behaviours have been suggested to be closely connected with the morality of adults. Similar benefits may also be assumed for children. Studying the relationship between personality and morality of children may be important for understanding their positive and negative interpersonal outcomes. Thus, the understanding of nature and life outcomes of the morality of children may have important implications for understanding their performance, functioning and well-being. In spite of these observations, there is a lack of studies on the morality of children in association with their personality predispositions. It may be speculated that the children may differ in the nature and mechanism of morality as well as its consequences for various life outcomes. The researchers have suggested that it would be a valuable contribution to investigating the links of personality traits with the morality of children (Vaish et al., 2011). The proposed study aimed to understand the nature and extent of association among the Big Five dimensions of personality and moral judgement of children aged between 7 years to 11 years.

## OBJECTIVES

The following were the major objectives of the present study:

- To study gender differences in the five dimensions of the Big Five personality and moral judgement,
- To understand the nature of association among the five dimensions of the Big Five personality and moral judgement, and
- To estimate variations accounted for by gender and the five dimensions of the Big Five personality in the moral judgement of children.

## Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were framed for this study:

- The female participants will show higher mean scores on the five dimensions of the Big Five personality and moral judgement as compared to their male counterparts.
- There will be positive correlations among the scores of the five dimensions of the Big Five personality and moral judgement of children.
- Gender and the five dimensions of the Big Five personality will account for significant variance in the scores of the moral judgement of children.

## Methods and Materials

The following were the basic features of methods employed in the present study:

### Research Design and Sampling

The study involved a correlational design of research. The participants were selected employing a convenient sampling from different schools of Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, India.

### Sample

Three hundred thirty children with age spanning from 7 years to 11 years ( $M = 9.99$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) took part in the study. Out of these, 165 were males (age range 8 years to 11 years,  $M = 10.01$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) while the rest 165 were female children (age range 7 years to 11 years,  $M = 9.99$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) who did not differ significantly in their mean age ( $t = 0.25$ ,  $df = 328$ ,  $p = 802$ ). The detailed biographic descriptions were also collected through a questionnaire. The participants were selected from different educational institutions of Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, India.

### Psychometric Tools

Following psychometric tools were used to collect data:

### Big Five Questionnaire-Children

The Big Five Questionnaire-Children (Barbaranelli, Caprara, Rabasca, & Pastorelli, 2003) was employed to measure the personality traits of children. This questionnaire has been adapted for children. This is a 65-item questionnaire that contains 13 items related to each of the five factors of energy/extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness,

emotional instability and intellect/openness. Items are scored using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Almost Never) to 5 (Almost Always).

### **Moral Judgement Test**

The Moral Judgement Test for children (Sinha, & Verma, 1971) has been constructed on the model of a general intelligence test in which items on reasoning, discrimination analogies and best answer etc. have been included but with the variation that all the items have a moral connotation. The test has been constructed for the children of 6 to 11 years of age. This is a 50 item scale that is divided into six parts. Discrimination consists of ten items with three alternatives in each. The incomplete sentence includes ten items which are in the shape of a sentence. Below each sentence, there are four alternatives given. Analogies consist of eight pair of words having certain relationships with a single word placed near each of them. The best moral answer has eight items that narrate certain incidents. Moral reasoning consists of six items which are in the form of problems that require logical reasoning by the subject for selecting the correct answer. The definition includes eight items that represent one moral value for each. For the definition of a given moral value, there are four alternatives for each item.

### **Procedure**

The personality measure was available in English. This scale was translated from English into Hindi followed by its back translation to English by the three experts. This followed the initial administration on the 50 participants, 10 parents and 10 teachers to develop insights regarding pertinent modifications to be incorporated in the scales to make them useful in a valid and culturally fit manner. After the adaptation of all the questionnaires, the participants were approached individually for administering the scales. Before the start of actual data collection, written consent from their parents and the principals were sought to allow their children to take part in the study. After the adaptation of the scales and collection of consent, the actual data collection was started.

### **Analysis of Data**

The data of the study were arranged according to the need for statistical analysis. To materialize the objectives of the study, the data were analyzed by using mean, standard deviation, t-test, Pearson Product Moment of Correlation and hierarchical regression. All these computations were carried out with the help of SPSS 2.5V.

### **Results**

The statistical analyses of the data have been given in two sections as per the objectives of the study. In the first section, mean, standard deviation and t-values have been discussed while regression analysis has been given in the second section.

#### **Preliminary Analysis**

In the preliminary section, mean scores and their corresponding standard deviation (SD), as well as t-values showing the significance of differences in the male and female children, have been presented. Table 1 displays that the female children exhibited significantly higher mean score on conscientiousness dimension of personality as compared to the male children. Similarly, the female children again achieved a significantly higher mean score on moral judgement as compared the male participants. Contrarily, the mean scores of extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability and

openness dimensions of personality did not evince significant gender differences (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Mean Scores and SDs of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness and Moral Judgement of the Male and Female Children**

S. No.	Measures	Gender	Mean	SD	t	df	P
1.	Extraversion	Male	38.53	10.58	0.92	328	.361
		Female	39.55	9.61			
2.	Agreeableness	Male	38.40	10.35	0.65	328	.516
		Female	39.13	9.98			
3.	Conscientiousness	Male	39.33	10.69	2.17	328	.031
		Female	41.84	10.37			
4.	Emotional Stability	Male	36.00	9.40	1.32	328	.188
		Female	37.32	8.76			
5.	Openness	Male	39.17	10.43	1.02	328	.310
		Female	40.31	9.91			
6.	Moral Judgement	Male	30.64	9.35	3.57	328	.000
		Female	34.13	8.34			

The coefficients of correlations were calculated among the scores of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness of children and the scores on moral judgement. It was evident that the scores of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and emotional stability dimensions of the personality of the male and female children demonstrated significant positive correlations with their corresponding scores on moral judgement measure. Irrespective of gender, the scores on predictors and criterion measures of children again evinced significant positive correlations (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Coefficients of Correlation among the Scores of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness and the Scores of Moral Judgement of the Male and Female Children**

S. No.	Predictors	Criterion	Male		Female		Overall	
			r	p	r	p	r	p
1.	Extraversion	Moral Judgement	.320**	.000	.240**	.002	.288**	.000
2.	Agreeableness	Moral Judgement	.310**	.000	.211**	.007	.266**	.000
3.	Conscientiousness	Moral Judgement	.359**	.000	.349**	.000	.368**	.000
4.	Emotional Stability	Moral Judgement	.156*	.045	.145	.063	.162**	.003
5.	Openness	Moral Judgement	.326**	.000	.247**	.001	.295**	.000

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

### Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Assuming gender, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness dimensions of Big Five personality as the predictors and moral judgement as the criterion, a set of hierarchical regression coefficients were computed to underscore the relative contributions in the variability of the criterion measure the results of which have been displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Assuming Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness as Predictors and Moral Judgement as Criterion**

Predictors	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5			Model 6		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Gender	3.485	.976	.194	3.231	.938	.179	3.241	.938	.180	2.557	.928	.142	2.636	.928	.146	2.646	.929	.147
E				.249	.046	.279	.185	.084	.207	.016	.091	.018	.067	.096	.075	.060	.098	.067
A							.077	.083	.087	-.143	.096	-.161	-.118	.097	-.133	-.132	.104	-.149
C										.404	.095	.474	.404	.095	.475	.391	.101	.459
ES													-.114	.072	-.115	-.117	.073	-.118
O																.039	.099	.044
R <sup>2</sup>	.037			.115			.118			.164			.171			.171		
F	12.76**			28.75**			0.86			18.16**			2.49			0.16		

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Abbreviations:** E = Extraversion, A = Agreeableness, C = Conscientiousness, ES = Emotional Stability, O = Openness.

The results of hierarchical regression analysis exhibited that the predicted value of moral judgement for males was 3.485 units higher than for females and gender accounted for 3.70% variance in the scores of this measure as depicted in Model 1 ( $R^2 = .037$ ,  $F(1, 328) = 12.76$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Likewise, Model 2 showed that the predicted value of moral judgement increased by .249 units for each unit of extraversion that accounted for 11.50% variations in the scores of moral judgement ( $R^2 = .115$ ,  $F(1, 327) = 28.75$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Likewise, the predicted value of moral judgement increased by .404 units for each unit of conscientiousness that accounted for 16.40% variations in the scores of moral judgement ( $R^2 = .164$ ,  $F(1, 325) = 18.16$ ,  $p = .000$ ). As the Model 4 was statistically significant, it may be inferred that the predicted value of moral judgement increased by .077 units for each unit of agreeableness that accounted for 11.80% variance in the scores of moral judgement ( $R^2 = .118$ ,  $F(1, 326) = 0.86$ ,  $p = .355$ ). Contrarily, emotional stability ( $R^2 = .171$ ,  $F(1, 324) = 2.49$ ,  $p = .115$ ) and openness ( $R^2 = .171$ ,  $F(1, 323) = 0.16$ ,  $p = .693$ ) did not contribute significantly in the variance of the scores of moral judgement of children (see Table 3).

## DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study showed that gender and Big Five personality dimensions carry a significant role in shaping the nature and extent of the moral judgement of children. The female children exhibited significantly higher mean scores on conscientiousness dimension of personality and moral judgement as compared the males. Contrarily, the mean scores of extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability and openness dimensions of personality did not evince significant gender differences. Irrespective of gender, the scores on predictors and criterion measures of children again evinced significant positive correlations. The results of hierarchical regression analysis exhibited that gender, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness accounted for 3.70%, 11.50%, 11.80% and 16.40% variations in the scores of moral judgement, respectively. These results partially support the Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 formulated to be approved by the findings of the present study.

The findings regarding gender differences in moral judgement have been contradictory. It may be argued that male and female children are socialized in a dissimilar manner not only in Indian society but throughout the world. Moreover, verbal ability, emotional intelligence and understanding of social relationship develop faster in female children as compared to their male counterparts. The gender differences in moral judgements of male and female children may be due to the dissimilarity in their emotional, social and religious attributes. It has also been suggested that due to gender



differences in affective traits, differences in moral judgements of male and female children may occur (Bettencourt, & Miller, 1996). According to Kohlberg (1984), gender differences in moral judgements may be observed as males are more drawn to justice-based morality and to responses to transgressions emphasizing fighting, vengeance, or justice. Women may be more drawn to warmth-based virtues, which are more in line with Gilligan's (1994) ethic of care. These facts are sufficient to explain gender differences in moral judgements found in the present study.

Many studies in the Indian context also evince gender differences in adults on many psychological measures. For example, gender differences have been observed in personality and forgiveness of adults (Mishra, Sharma, Prabhakar, Tiwari, & Rai, 2019; Mudgal, & Tiwari, 2015; Mudgal, & Tiwari, 2017a; Mudgal, & Tiwari, 2017b; Pandey, Tiwari, Parihar, & Rai, 2019b; Prabhakar, Mishra, Sharma, Tiwari, & Rai, 2019; Sharma, Prabhakar, Mishra, Tiwari, & Rai, 2019). Moreover, gender differences have also been reported on the measures of moral foundations (Parihar, Tiwari, Pandey, & Rai, 2018), self-compassion (Pandey, Tiwari, Parihar, & Rai, 2019a; Verma, & Tiwari, 2017a), positive mental health (Tiwari, Rai, Pandey, Verma, Parihar, Ahirwar, Tiwari, & Mandal, 2019) of Indian adults. In addition, gender differences in the forgiveness of Indian children have also been found (Ahirwar, Tiwari, & Rai, 2019b). There are certain limitations to this study. For example data from a limited geographical area, selection of a small number of variables and use of the only quantitative method of data collection may be said to be some of the limitations of this study.

The findings also demonstrated that extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness personality dimensions of the Big Five have contributed significantly to the moral judgement of children. The contributions of these personality traits for moral judgements can be explained in terms of the attributes of extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Researchers have argued that people with higher agreeableness show trust, altruism, kindness, affection and pro-social behaviours. In essence, the individuals with higher agreeableness tend to be more helping, caring, empathetic and approachable for others in need (Douglas, Bore, & Munro, 2016). These attributes associated with agreeableness may be argued to be behind its positive and predictive relation with moral judgement of children. Similarly, people with extraversion personality exhibit sociability, assertiveness and high emotional expressiveness and people with high extraversion are more sociable, outgoing, energetic and friendly (Douglas, Bore, & Munro, 2016). The findings of the study also showed that there was a positive correlation between conscientiousness and moral judgement. This personality trait also caused significant variance in the moral judgement of children. This finding may be explained in terms of the characteristic features of people with higher conscientiousness. The researchers have argued that people with higher on this personality trait show the abilities of delay of gratification and organization in their efforts. In addition, these people also exhibit a tendency of self-control for their impulses and act in socially acceptable ways (John, & Srivastava, 1999). They are also persistent, ambitious, thorough, self-disciplined, consistent, predictable, controlled, reliable, resourceful, hard-working, energetic, persevering and planner. The children in the present study having higher conscientiousness may naturally be expected to exhibit higher moral judgement as compared to those who score lower on this dimension.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that Big Five personality dimensions are very relevant for studying and understanding the moral judgement of children. The findings of the study showed that extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness accounted for significant variance in moral judgement of children. Moreover, significant positive correlations were observed among the scores of all the dimensions of personality and moral judgement of children. Significant gender differences were also



recorded in conscientiousness and moral judgement of children.

### **Implication and Directions for Future Research**

It may be argued that these findings carry some imperative implications to understand the link between personality and moral judgement of children. These findings may incite future research and may be important for all stakeholders devoted to the development of children. Future researchers can contribute by adding qualitative methods in their study (Ahirwar, Tiwari, & Rai, 2019a; Sharma, Tiwari, & Rai, 2018). In addition, the additions of self-concepts (Gujare, & Tiwari, 2016a; Gujare, & Tiwari, 2016b), metacognitive ability (Jain, Tiwari, & Awasthi, 2017; Jain, Tiwari, & Awasthi, 2018a; Jain, Tiwari, & Awasthi, 2018b) and positive body image (Jain, & Tiwari, 2016a; Jain, & Tiwari, 2016b; Parihar, Pandey, Tiwari, Mishra, & Rai, 2018; Tiwari, & Kumar, 2015; Tiwari, 2014; Tiwari, 2015) may enhance further comprehension of morality of children. Likewise, the use of Indian personality measure will certainly add further understanding of the morality of children (Verma, & Tiwari, 2017b). In the same manner, morality could be better understood by incorporating spirituality (Sharma, Tiwari, & Rai, 2017; Sharma, Tiwari, Rai, & Gour, 2018), emotional intelligence (Tiwari, 2016a), interdependent happiness and resilience (Raj, Tiwari, & Rai, 2019a; Raj, Tiwari, & Rai, 2019b) and positive health practices (Tiwari, 2016b; Tiwari, 2016c) to the studies of moral judgement of children.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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